

□ 1110

ONGOING TROUBLES AT
VETERANS AFFAIRS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. ADAMS) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ADAMS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the ongoing troubles at the VA and its apparent inability to effectively manage major construction projects, specifically, the new veterans hospital at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Orlando, Florida, in my congressional district.

Our Nation's veterans have served our country honorably, putting everything on the line to protect our freedoms. After all they have done for us, it is Congress' duty to ensure that our veterans' service-connected medical needs are taken care of.

The American people were told that for \$665 million they would receive a state-of-the-art medical facility to care for the hundreds of thousands of veterans in central Florida, which is one of the most underserved veteran populations in this country. This project is desperately needed in our community. Our veterans cannot wait any longer, nor can hardworking taxpayers afford more expensive delays.

Recently, Chairman MILLER held a hearing with the Veterans' Affairs committee to examine these delays. During the hearing, it became clear that incompetence and a lack of leadership from the VA is to blame for the egregious amount of errors with this project. Those errors include forgetting to order medical equipment, designing incompatible power sources in patient rooms, and designing doorways too small for the equipment that needs to get through them. These basic design errors are absolutely unacceptable, and we must hold the VA accountable for them.

While I am not a member of the committee, I felt it was my duty, as the Representative for central Florida veterans, to participate in the hearings and conduct the oversight necessary to get answers and move the project forward.

Having toured the hospital construction site recently, I knew that the project was behind schedule and over budget. Listening to the hearing testimony, coupled with seeing the site firsthand, reinforced the fact that the VA has fallen down on the job and is failing our veterans.

Veterans in my district have to drive hundreds of miles in some cases to get the cure and the care they need and have been promised—they've been promised—in return for their service to our Nation. These are often elderly men and women who cannot afford the trips. And we have young veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have sustained injuries that make those long trips incredibly painful.

This is not the best we can offer; and we should be ashamed, in the VA, that those brave warriors have to travel

long distances with the vague hope of getting the care they need. The VA can do better. We can do better.

Today's consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill helps put the VA's feet to the fire and will spur them to return the focus to our veteran population and not on bureaucratic mismanagement and political infighting.

The language of the bill makes it clear that, while the hospital construction remains fully funded, it is no longer an open-ended construction project with bills to be paid years into the future. The legislation states quite clearly that funds obligated to complete construction have to be spent within 5 years. The message should be heard loud and clear by the VA: get your management in gear and finish this hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the delays at this hospital are despicable, and the inability of the VA to provide what our veterans have been promised is unacceptable. Our veterans and their families have put everything on the line to defend our country. Making sure their service-connected needs are taken care of is the very least we can do to repay our Nation's heroes.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 14 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Rabbi Aaron Melman, Congregation Beth Shalom, Northbrook, Illinois, offered the following prayer:

We invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon the Members of this House.

Bless our leaders and all who work tirelessly for the good of our people with an understanding and discerning mind, a listening ear, a compassionate heart, and insightful thoughts.

Bless the people of the United States of America.

Help us to gain the insight to know what is good and true, for it is through Your spirit and love that we learn to become more human.

We thank You for enabling us to live in a free country, and we remember those who do not yet live with the same freedoms.

We pray that the leaders of our Nation help all those who are in need.

Shield our leaders and bless them. Protect our Armed Forces and speed our victory over tyranny. Let us make

each day more meaningful, helping others move towards a life of peace.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to You, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. DOLD led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING RABBI AARON
MELMAN

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to welcome my friend, Rabbi Aaron Melman. Rabbi Melman has served the families at Congregation Beth Shalom in Northbrook, Illinois, for the past 9 years, where he works with children and adults to help them better develop their faith.

Previously, he studied and taught in New York City, where he served as a student chaplain to the New York City Fire Department. On September 12, 2001, he found a way to get to Ground Zero, and thereafter provided comfort and support to those first responders in need.

Rabbi Melman is devoted to helping others. He serves as the president of the Chicago Region of the Rabbinical Assembly; he provides valued education to families through his work as a board member for the Chicago Center for Jewish Genetic Disorders; and he continues to support firefighters by serving as the chaplain to the Northbrook Fire Department.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honored to call Rabbi Melman my friend.

I do want to also congratulate Rabbi Melman and his bride, Elisa, on their 13th wedding anniversary, which they celebrated last night. We certainly appreciate you joining us and celebrating that with us today.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GINGREY of Georgia). The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-